

# MATTHEW 16 NOTES

## Matthew 16:1-12 - Prove It!

The religious leaders, who have memorized the Torah and should recognize the Messiah when He arrives, look squarely at Jesus with mistrust and demand a sign to prove that He is who He says He is. Their minds are set, their hearts are hardened.

Why does Jesus call them “evil and unfaithful”? \_\_\_\_\_

How is their demand different from the cry of the desperate father in Mark 9:24? \_\_\_\_\_

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Who has a corrupting influence on you? How can you be more alert to its danger and take precautionary steps to limit its influence upon you or your family? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the “sign of Jonah”? \_\_\_\_\_

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*Clue #1:* Jonah’s only words when he reluctantly wandered the streets of Ninevah on mission to the Assyrians (the Gentile, ruthless, arch enemies of Israel) were: “In 40 days Ninevah shall be destroyed.” Centuries later, the Jewish Temple sacrificial worship would cease with the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD, 40 years after Jesus’ prediction.

*Clue #2:* Jonah spent three days and nights in the belly of a whale, as good as dead, before having a second chance at life. Jesus will be in the tomb for a long weekend and then will surprise all by bursting back on the scene, vibrant with life and offering eternal life just as He had promised.

## Matthew 16:13-20- Who is Jesus? --Peter’s (and the Church’s) Confession

### -Who is Peter? The establishment of the papacy

Why is it so important to get the identity of Jesus ‘right’? \_\_\_\_\_

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“Jesus asks his disciples that devastating question: ‘But who do you say that I am?’ But the disciples don’t speak. Are they afraid? Perhaps. Finally, Simon Peter speaks: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ You are the *Mashiach*, the ‘anointed one,’ the long-awaited Savior; but more to it, you are the Son of God, not just a human hero. This is the mystical faith that stands at the heart of Christianity. To hold this Petrine faith is to be Christian; to deny it is to deny Christianity.

And then those amazing words of Jesus: ‘Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.’ This insight did not come from Simon’s own intelligent speculation. It came from above, through grace, from God. And this is why Peter is a rock.

The Church is built not on a worldly foundation of any kind but on a mystical foundation, born of Peter's faith in the revealing God. The Church is neither democratic nor aristocratic—it is charismatic. And this is where its power comes from."<sup>1</sup>

Peter's confession of "Jesus as the Messiah reflects the disciples' hope that Jesus would deliver Israel from its enemies and establish God's kingdom on earth. Up to verse 16b, the account closely parallels Mark 8:27-29. But to Mark's narrative Matthew adds in verse 16b a further specification of Jesus' identity as the 'Son of the living God.'"<sup>2</sup> What does it mean to you that Jesus is both deliverer and God? \_\_\_\_\_

Only revelation by the Father can convince us that Jesus is both human and divine.

### **Matthew 16:18-19**

Only three persons in the Old Testament received new names from God: Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob--- each time signifying a change in vocation. What is the significance of Jesus changing Peter's name to "rock"? \_\_\_\_\_

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"The name 'Peter' is from the Greek word for 'rock,' *petra*. This word was never before used as a man's name. So, in this passage, Jesus identifies St Peter as the 'rock' on which he will build his 'church' that will overcome 'hades.' This is temple-building imagery. Jews knew the Temple in Jerusalem was built on a great natural stone slab called the 'foundation stone,' which they believed blocked up the shaft that led down to the realm of the dead: *Hades* in Greek and *Sheol* in Hebrew. So Jesus is comparing his church to a new temple built on Peter.

Now let's look at the 'keys of the kingdom' and the 'binding and loosing.' In the ancient kingdom of David, the officer in charge of the palace was the king's top advisor and right-hand man, the second most powerful person in the kingdom. Scholars call him 'the royal steward,' and he wore the keys of the palace tied to his shoulder as a sign of his office (Isaiah 22:22). Only he had the authority to unlock or lock the palace, so he controlled access to the king. If you wanted to see the king, you had to go through the royal steward. No one but the king himself could contradict him; therefore, they used to say about the royal steward, 'He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open' (Is 22:22). Jesus echoes this line when he says, 'Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' So Jesus is making Peter his royal steward, his 'big number two.'

But 'binding and loosing' had another meaning in Jesus' day. Jews used the phrase to speak about the authority to make official interpretations of religious law. Religious law always needed to be interpreted. God said that on the Sabbath 'you shall not do any work' (Ex 20:10), but what is 'work'? Is starting a fire 'work'? The Jewish teachers said yes, yet you were permitted to take a half mile walk.

So, in Matthew 16, Jesus is making Peter his 'chief rabbi.' Peter will interpret divine law. Heaven will guide him and back him up. As Catholics, we know this authority of Peter was

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<sup>1</sup> Barron, Bishop Robert. *Daily Gospel Reflections: Matthew 16: 13-23*, August 4, 2022. Accessed online from [wof@wordonfire.org](mailto:wof@wordonfire.org).

<sup>2</sup> Karris, Robert, OFM, General Editor. *The Collegeville Bible Commentary: New Testament*. (c) 1992 by The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, pp 885.

passed on to his successors, the bishops of Rome, to our present day. That's why, when faced with new issues that require the interpretation of divine law, such as new biotechnologies, we look to the pope for guidance to determine what is right and wrong.

Finally, 'binding and loosing' can refer to retaining or forgiving sins, as in Revelation 1:5: 'Jesus has loosed us from our sins.' So Peter's power to 'bind and loose' includes the authority to forgive sin. We see this also at the end of John, when Jesus breathes on the apostles after his resurrection and says, 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' (John 20:23). Peter will be the chief 'forgiver of sins.' He seems to realize this, and a little while later, during Jesus' famous Church Discourse (Matt 18), he asks Jesus some practical specifics about forgiving sins (Matt 18:21-22)."<sup>3</sup>

**Summary:** "Jesus portrays the Church as a spiritual Temple (see 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-8). As Solomon was the son of David and the anointed Temple builder in the OT, so Jesus is the Davidic 'Son' of God (16:16) and the anointed Messiah who builds the Church in the New. Jesus elsewhere sees himself as both similar and superior to King Solomon (12:42). Among the Gospels, Matthew alone uses the word 'church' (18:17). The word is often used in the Greek OT for the 'congregation' or 'assembly' of Israel united to God. Jesus uses it in a similar way for the New Covenant community.

How would you explain the Biblical roots of the Papacy to a non-Catholic? Why is the Papacy a great gift to Christians, giving certainty to our faith, handed down through generations by the exercise of the authority of Christ Himself? \_\_\_\_\_

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"Jesus did not leave the care of his flock to whoever felt like preaching or teaching or to an individual who experienced a private inner nudging to start a church. With over 25,000 Christian denominations to choose from, how does the believer know with certain that his or her denomination is correct? By what authority do they speak?

Throughout the Old Testament, God exercised His authority through earthly leaders such as Noah, Moses, and David. While they were mighty men, they occasionally lapsed into times of personal weakness. We today do not disregard or discount their authority on account of their frailties, rather, we take courage in the fact that they like us. Those who either doubt or choose to believe a skewed version of church history due to an anti-Catholic bias, fail to see God's authority hidden in fragile flesh. Jesus continues to govern and lead his flock by bestowing his authority upon mere mortals. This divine accommodation not only confounds the devil but continues the celebration of the mystery of the incarnation.

To assure that his flock would continually hear his voice, Jesus appointed Peter as the head of his church. Through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the Church has for two thousand years clearly heard the voice of the Great Shepherd. The deposit of faith, that truth which has

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<sup>3</sup> Bergsma, John. *New Testament Basics for Catholics*. (c) 2015 by Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN, pp 51-54.

been protected and taught from generation to generation, has not always been an easy word, nor a popular word, but a sure and needed word.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Matthew 16:21-23- The Inevitability of Suffering and the Impending Passion**

Suffering- We will do any maneuver to avoid it. It is at this precise point in the Gospel of Matthew that a significant turning point occurs that causes earthquake tremors in the hearts of the apostles: Jesus predicts His Passion for the first time in detail.

How does Peter instinctively respond? Why does Jesus respond so strongly? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why is Peter acting as an “obstacle” to Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

How is Peter’s allergic reaction to the mere suggestion that the Messiah will suffer play into Satan’s hands? How was avoidance of suffering part of Satan’s temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4)? \_\_\_\_\_

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Can you be an authentic follower of Christ without boldly facing suffering? Are you “better than the Master” (John 15:20) and entitled to a cozy lifestyle if He went without housing and food? \_\_\_\_\_

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“God had one son on earth without sin, but never one without suffering”- St Augustine.

Why is Peter’s “thinking” so, so wrong? \_\_\_\_\_

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Jesuit Father Jean-Pierre Caussade in his book of compiled letters of spiritual direction to the Visitation Nuns of Nancy, France, entitled *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, writes: “For those who have surrendered themselves completely to God, all they are and do has power. Their lives are sermons. They are apostles. God gives a special force to all they say and do, even to their silence, their tranquility and their detachment, which, quite unknown to them, profoundly influence other people. The matrix in which we surrender ourselves to the promptings of divine Providence is the sacrament of the present moment. There is nothing better for us than to do what God wants at any particular moment. We must regard everything else with complete indifference and as something worth nothing at all.

To live by faith produces a certain detachment of soul which enables us to handle any situation and every kind of person. It purifies us of self-conceived ideas and high-flown imaginings of God by persuading us that ‘all you suffer, all you do, all your inclinations are mysteries under which God gives himself to you.’

In the end, self-abandonment to divine Providence teaches us that there can be nothing great in us—with one exception: our total receptivity to God’s will. And yet, that receptivity makes us saints, and the life of each saint is the life of Jesus Christ. It is a new Gospel. That is why our life here is a spectacle which makes heaven rejoice.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Madrid, Patrick. *Pope Fiction: Answers to 30 Myths & Misconceptions About the Papacy*. (c)2000 by Basilica Press, San Diego, CA, pp 13-15.

<sup>5</sup> Cameron, Father Peter John, OP. *The Classics of Catholic Spirituality*. Chapter 13: Abandonment to Divine Providence by Jean-Pierre de Caussade. (c) 1996 by Alba House, New York, NY, pp 101-110.

### **Matthew 16:24-28- The Cost of Discipleship**

What has it cost you to be a disciple of Jesus, who has crucified hands, feet, and side? Where would you draw the line: as this is too much to suffer for You, Lord? What are you willing to do this day that is like a cross to you, large or small? \_\_\_\_\_

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“Choosing to suffer means that there must be something wrong with you, but choosing God’s will – even if it means you will suffer--- is something very different. No normal, healthy saint ever chooses suffering; he simply chooses God’s will, just as Jesus did, whether it means suffering or not. *And no saint should ever dare to interfere with the lesson of suffering being taught in another saint’s life.*

Look at God’s incredible waste of His saints, according to the world’s judgment. God seems to plant His saints in the most useless places. And then we say, ‘God intends for me to be here because I am so useful to Him.’ Yet Jesus never measured His life by how or where He was of the greatest use. God places His saints where they will bring the most glory to Him, and we are totally incapable of judging where that may be.... And after you surrender—then what? Your entire life should be characterized by an eagerness to maintain unbroken fellowship and oneness with God.”<sup>6</sup> How is God using you right now, where you live and among whom you circulate today? How is suffering part of that equation? What is your response to the crosses that Jesus in His wisdom has given you? \_\_\_\_\_

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At the end of a day we are to be able to quietly submit: “I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4)--- serenely, without whining, carrying the cross as Jesus did.

### **Matthew 16:25-26**

“The least good of grace is superior to the natural good of the entire universe” --St Thomas Aquinas.<sup>7</sup> Remember the Parable of finding the ‘pearl of great price’ and selling everything to buy it (Matthew 13:45-46)? When you make an evaluation of what really matters, where does God and His desires (will) fall? \_\_\_\_\_

**In sum:** “*Jesus is inviting you to the funeral of your own independence!* The natural life is not spiritual, and it can be made spiritual only through sacrifice.”<sup>8</sup>

**Final thought from St Julian of Norwich:** “Our Lord wants us to be occupied in this: rejoicing in him, for he rejoices in us.”<sup>9</sup>

**Recommended reading:** *Pope Fiction: Answers to 30 Myths & Misconceptions About the Papacy* by Patrick Madrid. Foreword by Jeff Cavins. (c) 2000 by Basilica Press, San Diego, CA.

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<sup>6</sup> Chambers, Oswald. *My Utmost for His Highest*. (c) 1992 by Our Daily Bread Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, August 10, Sept 13.

<sup>7</sup> Aquinas, St Thomas. *Summa Theologia*, I-II, q. 113, a. 9. As quoted by *The Navarre Bible: St Matthew: Texts & Commentaries*. (c) 1998 by Four Courts Press, Dublin, Ireland, pp 154.

<sup>8</sup> Oswald, December 9.

<sup>9</sup> Cameron, pp 22.